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ABSTRACT

The Shawano County Evaluation Project examines the results of programing efforts by Extension personnel, county and statewide, over a 15-year period. It attempts to deal with results of all 13 Extension program areas, which range from 4-H to programs for doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. The paper describes the four major variables being examined, through interviews with both a random sample of 1,200 households and selected people known to have high contact with Extension. They are: (1) nature and amount of contact, (2) perception of helpfulness of that contact, (3) examples of specific results, (4) overall benefit framework. The variables are designed to fit and relate information about specific programs at a macro level. The paper describes how a telephone interview schedule was developed for use both with people with little or no contact with Extension and those who had had extensive contact. The paper also discusses certain philosophical assumptions inherent in this approach to macro-level program evaluation: (1) in adult education, few program participants hold the same specific objectives, but most have common broad objectives, (2) perception of help and value is as important as, or more important than, proof of results being attained. (Author/MS)

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PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

OR

EXAMINING RESULTS OF SEVERAL PEOPLE'S EFFORTS IN SEVERAL PROGRAMS OVER SEVERAL YEARS - ONE TYPE OF "MACRO PROGRAM EVALUATION"

There's no new or sophisticated methodology about the Shawano Project. If it is different from hundreds of other projects, it's because we are trying to manage a study which ordinarily would be broken up into about 30 separate pieces.

Because of the problems of bringing 150 copies of a long paper, I will not take space to cover any of the following completely, but will skim through:

1. Introduction to the project
2. Macro-evaluation dimensions of the product
3. Evaluative aspects of the project
4. Approach to results data
5. Development of the cross-sectional questionnaire

INTRODUCTION TO THE SHAWANO PROJECT

Dr. Laverne Forest, Mary Marshall (Project Assistant), and I are responding to a request from an Extension District Director *to examine the impact of Extension in a county*. The project has special ES-USDA funding as a means of testing evaluation approaches. Some of the important background things about the project are:

1. We are committed both to studying the impact (securing and communicating data) and to examining how Extension staff and Shawano leaders interpret and use the data.
2. We are committed to getting data on all of Wisconsin's 13 program areas: ag, home ec, 4-H, government development, business, engineering, health sciences, social work services, communications, labor education, environmental education, liberal studies, and education (not correct titles).
3. Extension reaches people through county activities, statewide activities, extensive use of media, courses, meetings, workshops, committee work, Independent Study, allied clubs — almost every possible means. We are dealing with all of them.
4. We are using the Bennett model as a general guide and as a means of examining impact. We are looking at: people reached, means by which they are reached, their reactions, the results they feel they have achieved, and the type and amount of benefit from those results.
5. We are looking at cumulative impact over several years.
6. The total project has several stages. We have completed the enumeration of Extension input in the county during the past 20 years. And now we are midway into two big surveys. (Coding is just about completed.) The two major studies (interviews with 300 leaders and interviews with 1,200 cross-sectional respondents) will provide the bull of the information. However, if necessary, we may also do some smaller program-specific studies.
7. We have worked with about 30 Extension agents and statewide faculty up to this point and expect to be working very closely with them in establishing standards of performance against which to check the data and in attempting to interpret and form conclusions from the data.

Paper prepared by Dr. Sara M. Steele, Division of Program and Staff Development, University of Wisconsin-Extension, for Adult Education Research Conference, Toronto, April, 1976.

MACRO-EVALUATION DIMENSION OF THE PROJECT

Each of the three of us - Laverne, Mary, and I - are "doing our own thing" with the project, as well as meeting our project commitments as a team. My "thing" for the past few years has been *program* evaluation. However, because of the great deal of confusion in how people interpret "program," I've come to use the term macro-evaluation.

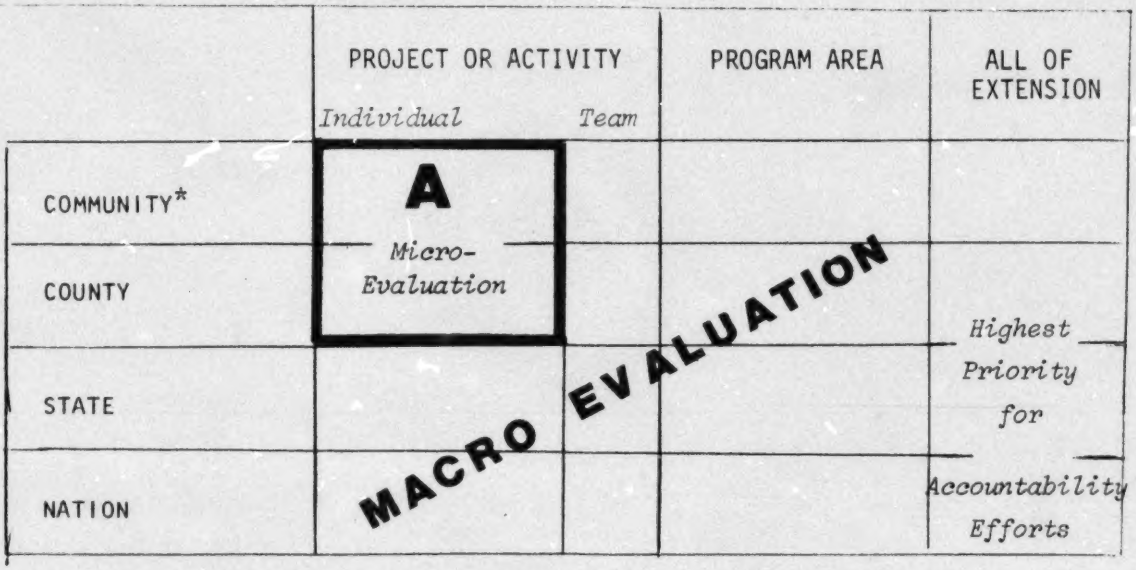
It is much easier to say what macro-evaluation isn't than to be precise about what it is. To me, macro-evaluation *excludes* focusing solely on a single project, course, or activity by an individual at one location. For the most part, it excludes the type of thing that most of us learned was educational evaluation when we did our course-work in the 1950's or 1960's. This *micro*-type evaluation - individually done, project-focused - is important and is very useful to the individual who conducts the project or course, but it serves a different purpose from macro-evaluation.

Macro-evaluation is the evaluating of the whole formed by several pieces. It does one or more of the following:

1. Helps monitor progress on total mission and long-range objectives.
2. Helps summarize the results of the work of several people.
3. Puts things together over space (similar programs in several locations) or time (several activities by the same person over a period of years).

This type of evaluation is particularly needed by state and national-level Extension administrators, although it is also essential to the individual Extension person who deals with 3- to 10-year blocks of time and does more than live for the moment. The top administrator's need for results information to support and defend budget has been the main impetus, both for evaluation and in training faculty in evaluation. This need has been poorly met by past evaluation teaching The diagram below shows several possible loci for evaluation. Most of us think only of the area of the chart marked A - an individual evaluating a particular course, project, or activity, in one location.

LOCI OF EVALUATION



* *Community* refers both to specific geographic locations and to "community" in the sense of like people geographically dispersed.

There is some disharmony here. True, results for all of the other loci come about through combinations of A's. However, the most efficient way of evaluating or of reporting does not come from piecing together reports done independently by a large number of A's. Not only is such an effort terribly time-consuming and frustrating, but often the report misses a quality which is the sum of the efforts.

In the Shawano Project, we are focusing on the county and community level and seeing how the individual pieces fit together in the following wholes:

1. The work of one agent over a period of time (individual - county).
2. Agents' and specialists' activities (in and out of county) in a particular program area (team and program area - county).
3. The combined efforts of all program areas (all of Extension - county).
4. Extension's impact on various "communities" within the county, both geographic and demographic (all of Extension - community).

In addition, we will be trying to put together the whole of Extension contact of individuals and households over a period of time.

We are trying for simple methods, and hope that some will prove sufficiently practical and valuable that they can be adapted to other situations.

EVALUATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PROJECT

Much of the project will be descriptive, describing amount of contact, proportion of various clientele reached, nature of results perceived, etc.

To be evaluative, a project has to involve the making of judgments. The Shawano Project is exploring three dimensions of evaluation.

1. We are asking respondents to make judgments about the helpfulness of their contacts with Extension and about how Extension operates.
2. We are asking Extension personnel and lay leaders to set standards of performance (what percentage should) against which to compare data.
3. We will be helping Extension personnel and Shawano leaders form judgments based on the data.

APPROACH TO RESULTS DATA

Most people associate evaluation with evaluation of results. Some define results specifically in terms of changes produced by education. In terms of looking at changes produced through Extension contact, we are using the following:

1. open-ended responses to questions which ask for examples of how Extension information has been used. We will look for patterns.
2. judgments of amount of benefit gained in relation to a general benefit framework: economic, environmental, physiological, socio-psychological, socio-political, and educational resources.

The first approach will help us determine whether, from the clientele's point of view, important results do coalesce and mass around certain objectives held by Extension personnel, or if result is unique to each participant.

The second will help us summarize a variety of very specific kinds of results into major result For example, although the nature of the ability is different, the lawyer, the 4-H leader, and the farmer are all helped to develop their own talents and abilities (socio-psychological benefit area).

DEVELOPING THE CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY

The major data input comes through two surveys. I've worked with the cross-sectional study and will share a few of our experiences.

1. We met with "think groups" representing Extension program areas and explored what information they wanted. We tried to get them to identify decisions they needed to make, but were not very successful.

2. Our first ideas involved about 30 separate sub-studies. On the advice of our national advisory group, we decided that we could probably get the crucial information through a cross-sectional study.

3. We decided on interviews with a minimum of 1,000 households. The main factor in choosing this large a sample (the population of the county is only 35,000) is that we wanted a sample of about 100 farmers, and farmers make up about 1/5 of the population. We're not sure if we will have enough elderly or Native Americans out of the 1,000 or whether we will have to do some further interviewing specifically with these, or with other potential clientele who appear in small numbers within the county's population.

4. The actual telephone survey was contracted to Survey Research Laboratory. We worked with their staff in design, instrument development, etc.

5. Their experience showed that it is possible to complete accurate telephone interviews which go as long as 45 minutes or an hour if the respondent is comfortable with the questions. Telephone survey proved less costly and fully as productive as in-house surveying.

6. After putting everything everyone wanted to know together, we found the instrument went way beyond an hour. We split it into two versions, using some of the same questions in each, but different detailed questions. Of course, we weeded out a lot of low-priority questions. "Skip-outs" became a crucial phenomenon, moving a person who had not had a particular kind of experience on to another lead question: for example, skipping the non-4-H person over a page of questions related to 4-H.

7. After the pre-test, we found the instrument was too much of a burden for people who have had little or no contact with Extension. So we developed a third, much-reduced schedule - Schedule C.

   The cover sheet (introduction to the interview) asks the respondent how much contact (s)he has had with Extension. Schedule C is used with those who respond "Little" or "None." The cover sheet directs the interviewer to either Schedule A or Schedule B if the response is "Some" or "Much."

   About 20 different people did the interviewing. They tended to stay with either the A or B schedules.

   Schedule C, however, asks two pages of questions about Extension contact because we are aware that people often do not remember or recognize that a contact is Extension. We ask about 4-H or about contacts with agents both by name and by position. We expect we will find a percentage who said they had no contact, but on later exploration actually have had contact.

The survey was completed in mid-March with a total of 1,192 interviews or an 80.5% response rate. Of the interviews, 174 were on Schedules A or B. (These schedules were about 34 pages long and took about an hour.) The C Schedule was 13 pages long and took about 20 minutes. (2,545 telephone numbers were called, but 1,065 were non-sample cottages, businesses, or not in Shawano County.)

I'm sorry that it is too early to talk about results of the approaches used. However, if something mentioned here interests you, get in touch.